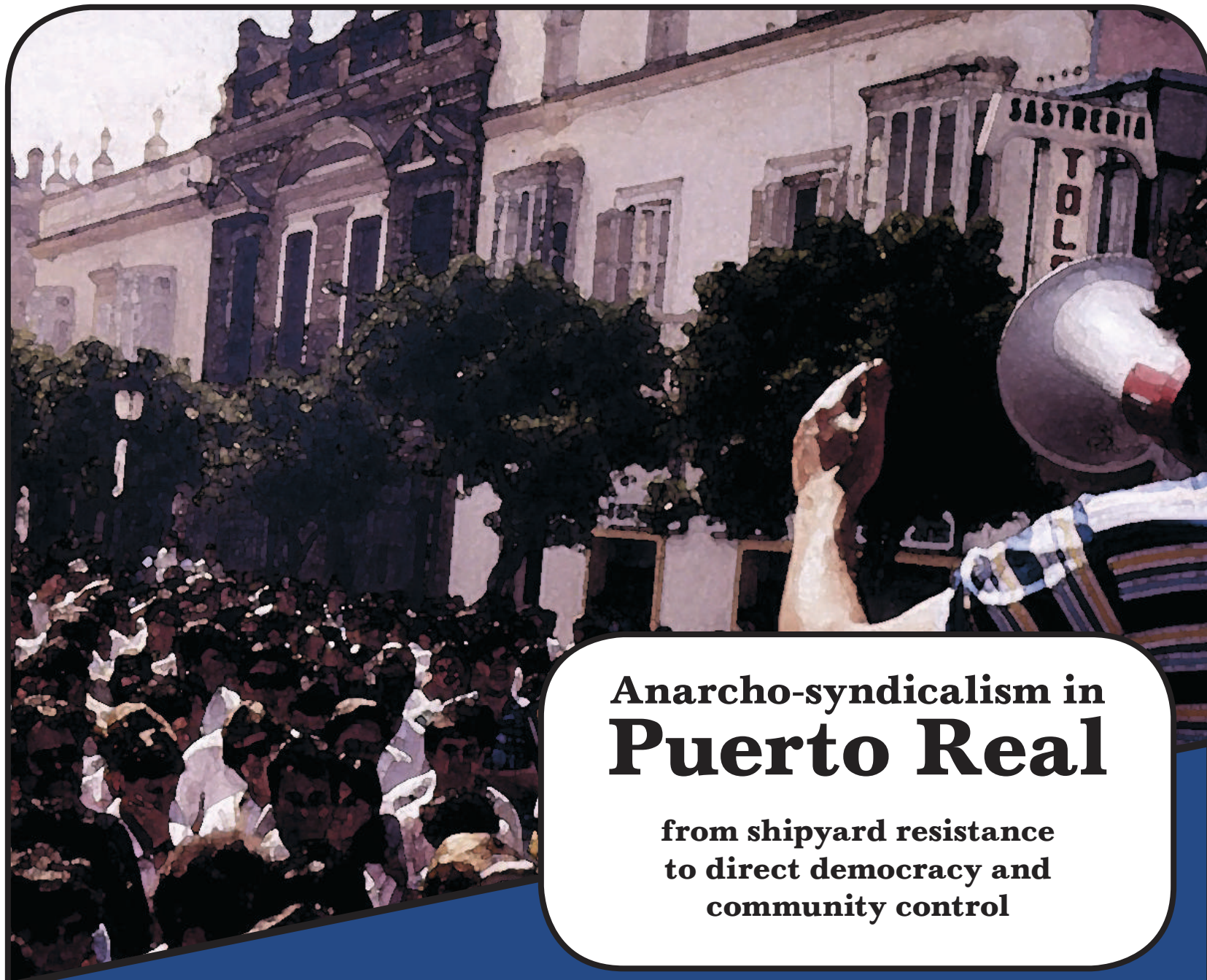


The 1987 struggle against threatened closure in and around the shipyards of Puerto Real, Spain, in both workplace and community witnessed the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT playing both a prominent and decisive role.

The CNT's involvement meant that the methods of organising and the forms of action taken departed from those common to reformist unions - with dramatic consequences. Mass assemblies both in the yards and surrounding localities involved workers, their families, neighbours and all supporters.



## Anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real

**from shipyard resistance  
to direct democracy and  
community control**

**Cover: A striker addresses a mass street meeting in Puerto Real**



## About us

The Solidarity Federation is a revolutionary union initiative: an organisation of workers seeking the abolition of capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit worldwide. The state because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for the classes who control it and their servants; it cannot be used to fight the oppression and exploitation that are the consequences of hierarchy and the source of privilege. In their place we want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism. That society can only be achieved by working class organisations based on the same principles - revolutionary unions. These are not trade unions only concerned with issues like pay and conditions.

Revolutionary unions are a means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside - which arise from our oppression. We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful. Therefore, revolutionary unions support organisation in all spheres of life that consciously parallel those of the society we wish to create; that is, organisation based on mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, direct democracy, and opposed to domination, hierarchy and exploitation in all forms. We are committed to building a new society within the shell of the old in both our workplaces and the wider community. Unless we organise in this way, politicians - some claiming to be revolutionary - will be able to exploit us for their own ends.

The Solidarity Federation consists of Locals and Industrial Networks which seek to take on the functions of revolutionary unions - supporting our organising efforts where we live and work. Our activities are based on direct action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials; our decisions are made through participation of the membership. We welcome all workers - including the unemployed, retired, stay-home parents and students - who will work within our Aims and Principles and seek to create revolutionary unions to fight for a better world.

## *The theory & practice series*

This series is published to both document interesting accounts from workers in struggle, as well as attempts to draw the theoretical lessons from them. Both original and republished texts are included. Most, but not all, are from the anarcho-syndicalist tradition. All are selected for their relevance for workers looking to organise today.

[www.solfed.org.uk](http://www.solfed.org.uk)



[solfed@solfed.org.uk](mailto:solfed@solfed.org.uk)

## CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Rationalisation and resistance	4
Direct action and direct democracy	7
Organising beyond the workplace: community-wide action	9
Interviews: Women's involvement	11
After the strike...	12
2004: The shipyard struggle continues	15
Interview with a member of CNT Seville (2004)	24

First printed in 1995 Solidarity Federation / La Presa publication.

Extended and re-printed in May 2011.





## Foreword

The 1987 struggle in and around the shipyards of Puerto Real in Cadiz, Spain, in both workplace and community, against threatened closure witnessed the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT playing both a prominent and decisive role.

The CNT's involvement meant that the methods of organising and the forms of action taken departed from those common to reformist unions -- with dramatic consequences.

When the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español - Spanish equivalent to the Labour Party) government announced a programme of 'rationalisation' at the Puerto Real shipyards, the workforce came out on strike. The CNT was at the forefront in spreading the action to the surrounding population. Not only was the government defeated, but a number of pay and condition improvements were secured.

In this not only did the great determination and ingenuity on the part of the workers bring results, but that of the communities too. Mass assemblies both in the yards and surrounding localities involved workers, their families, neighbours and all supporters. Initiating and maintaining entire communities' involvement in mass assemblies alone was fine achievement.

By all accounts the work of the CNT in and around Puerto Real established direct democracy as an inherent part of local political culture and resistance - people deciding for themselves, rejecting control by unaccountable politicians, union officials or other 'experts', ensuring control remains in the workplace and locality, not imposed unchallenged from above, be it by boards of directors or government, local or national.

Since the 1987 strike in the shipyards, other disputes, campaigns and issues have been linked-up - struggles around health, taxation, economic, cultural issues and environment have all been drawn together into activities of resistance.

Here in Britain, as in Spain, we had similar problems, not only in shipbuilding but across the whole spectrum of industry. Communities and livelihoods are decimated by the bosses' and governments' self-perpetuating dogma of profit, profit, profit. Capitalism's ability to adapt in the face of change and crisis shows no regard whatsoever for the consequences felt by the individual and society. We are, or rather, we are encouraged to believe that we are powerless to effect any real change in our lives. No political party or trade union has anything to offer but yet

more bitter medicine and false promises. The crisis of society and grip of poverty only deepens.

The time has come for real resistance, the building of a workers' movement that fights not just for higher wages and better conditions, but against the whole capitalist system. The experiences and actions of Spanish workers have provided valuable lessons in the past. Today as we get deeper into the 21st century, new situations arise and new ideas are needed. It is to help this process that this pamphlet is published.

## **Rationalisation and Resistance**

**P**epe Gomez, of the Spanish anarcho syndicalist union CNT's Puerto Real / Cadiz section, was the guest speaker at the "Trade Unionism In Crisis - Building An Anarcho-Syndicalist Alternative" dayschool, hosted by the transport, public service and education workers' networks in London, 30th October 1993:

"I would like to bring greetings from the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist organisation the CNT. I hope that links between British and Spanish workers through this particular conference can be increased.

Today I would like to talk about the rationalisation of the shipyards in Puerto Real in the south-west of Spain and the kind of activities the CNT has been involved in.

First of all I would like to place rationalisation within its context in 1980's and '90's Spain. Rationalisation is a capitalist necessity, something which is in response to a permanent situation of needing to rationalise and change the mode of production. Capital changes its course throughout society and changes its destination in order to increase profits in certain industries, with capital not being fixed but moving around. I'd also like to point out that there is no solution to this ever-increasing process of rationalisation within the capitalist system, but rather we propose a revolutionary solution to the problem of rationalisation.

Within this context I'd like to point out that capitalism needs certain instruments to be able to achieve a status quo. Capitalism needs its political parties, it needs its reformist unions, which have become pillars of the capitalist system itself. Reformist unions have been bred by capitalism and the mainstay of the reformist has become one whereby any kind of rebellion or questioning from a working class perspective is essentially neutralised.

I don't think that I need to emphasise the failings and the outrageous nature of reformist unions and the political parties, so I'll go on to talk about the specific situation in Puerto Real.

There are two points inherited from a Marxist perspective. First of all, Marxism separates the political and the economic to try and promote the idea of economic unions, unions that deal purely and simply with economic issues, whereas the political issues are tackled by the political party. Secondly, we are left with the need to struggle against the whole culture that has been built up around delegating activities, around delegating power to others. Anarcho-syndicalism is trying to oppose these negative legacies of Marxism, so that people are actually re-educated in order to destroy this culture of dependency and to build up a new kind of culture that is based on activity and action for people, by themselves.

Real revolutionary organisations and real revolutionaries are not necessarily the first and should not be defined by whether they take up guns or weapons to fight against exploitation. What we are really concerned with is building an organisation whereby people can actually properly participate and make decisions on their own two feet. This we see as a much more valid form of direct action than resorting to armed struggle.

I would like to illustrate through slides that through many years of education and struggle, something like fifteen years in Puerto Real, we have managed to form an organisation that is in permanent dialogue. It is an organisation which has provided the possibility of solutions to particular problems which are outside of the parliamentary arena.

The most important thing that I would like to point out, is that we managed to create a structure whereby there was a permanent assembly taking place. In other words decisions within this particular conflict were made by those people who were directly involved in the conflict:

Every Thursday of every week, in the towns and villages in the area, we had all-village assemblies where anyone who was connected with the particular issue, whether they were actually workers in the shipyard itself, or women or children or grandparents, could go along to the village assembly and actually vote and take part in the decision-making process of what was going to take place. So we created a structure which was very different from the kind of structure of political parties, where the decisions are made at the top and they filter down. What we managed to do in Puerto Real was make decisions at the base and take them upwards,

which is in complete contrast to the ways in which political parties operate.

Anarcho-syndicalism, or as some people prefer, the term revolutionary syndicalism, is nothing unless it has an anarchist base. What we tried to do in Puerto Real is show that the anarcho-syndicalist union is not just an industrial organisation that takes on factory disputes, but rather has a much wider social and political aim. What we have done in Puerto Real so far is attempt to interlink various different disputes, taking on various struggles around education, around the provision of health services, cultural aspects, and we've been struggling against the proposed construction of a new golf course, the privatisation of a cemetery, we've been fighting against various local tax increases. In other words we have been trying to show that the anarcho-syndicalist union is much wider than just focusing on industrial issues.

What we've managed to do is organise a movement which is co-ordinated on an ecological level, in order to struggle against these various projects which are being talked about. We have managed to link together twelve





different organisations within the local area that are all interested in fighting these various aspects, whether it's increased taxes or the golf course mentioned earlier, or the privatisation of the cemetery. So again, anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real is not just fighting on the industrial level, but has managed to interlink all kinds of disputes of a fairly diverse nature.

We have tried to ensure that this organisation, which is composed of twelve different bodies, is directed by a sense of consensus rather than any organisation imposing their particular ideas on the organisation. So we have tried to establish a system of direct democracy, whereby the organisations can put various points on the agenda and those points will be discussed. There is no central or overall control, or directing group which has the power over the rest, it is very much a federalist and openly democratic organisation.

## **Direct Action and Direct Democracy**

**T**he whole conflict kicked off as a result of people at the shipyard not having work for something like five years. What the government wanted to do was shut them down completely.

At the end of 1987, when the King of Spain was due to visit Puerto Real, the CNT in order to highlight the dispute, decided to block off the main road and only bridge linking Cadiz with Puerto Real - an important and strategic place. We barricaded the road to prevent the King of Spain from coming across.

Every Tuesday was dedicated to acts of sabotage and direct action; telephones were cut off, the whole province was without telephones every Tuesday. Every Thursday we used to concentrate on the assemblies in the villages.

Over a thousand police from different parts of the country came to Puerto Real to try and contain these activities. Accusations were made that a child who was on the way to hospital died because of the CNT barricades, but we always let ambulances through. They were the only vehicles allowed through.

Each Tuesday we occupied the offices in the shipyard from 7am until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. As the shipyard was very large, we were only able to build barricades in certain areas. Every Tuesday as the occupation finished, we had to protect people from the police as they retreated, so

comrades were up on one or two of the ships armed with catapults and other things, to defend people as they retreated.

At one point when the barricades were set up on the outskirts of the town, of course they wouldn't let the police in. From the roofs of flats people would throw plant pots, fridges, tables, all old useless stuff at the coaches bringing in police. The railway line was also cut by building barricades and also felling the telegraph poles.

Also on Tuesdays were the assemblies in the shipyards themselves. Any decision that was taken in these assemblies of course was independent of any official union presence or official union ideas.

We managed to get a great deal of support from the rest of the CNT, of course. There were meetings that took place all over the country, from Galicia to Barcelona. There was also economic help which came across. One of the most important things, a key element in the dispute, was that the CNT was particularly strong in Puerto Real itself. So that was where most support came from. Workers who were in different industries and also different unions supported the struggle.

Another important thing was that of the four thousand workers at the shipyard, two thousand of those workers were members of the UGT (socialist union) and Comisiones Obreras (communist union), and in the workers' assemblies the proposals of the CNT, in opposition to the approaches of the other unions, were always carried bypassing completely any suggestions that were made by the other unions. A very important aspect of this particular conflict was that the CNT's proposals were always accepted unanimously.

After about six months of sustained activity, instead of closing they got some work for the shipyards. Eight ships came in to be refitted. That was one of the results of the sustained activity.

Another achievement was a decent early retirement package at 55, where the pension would be linked entirely with the wages of those workers still working - a 100% link, equal to that of those still in work, also linked to any increase in salary achieved over the next nine years up to the age of 64. So that was quite a remarkable achievement.

We also achieved a rotation of people, so that if there was not sufficient work some comrades would work for two months, others would not work for those two months. But everyone would receive 100% of their wage. After two months those people who had been working would come in. So there was rotation of work in accordance with what was available, but

everyone received 100% of the wage.

The shipyards are still functioning and there is a lot of work especially from the building of double-hulled ships, ecological ships, from a joint project between Great Britain, France and Spain.

## **Organising beyond the workplace: Community-wide action**

**W**hat we've tried to do is show people that various different problems are interlinked, such as the golf course, problems over taxes and other things. So what we've tried to do is show that for example ecological problems are not just ecological problems, but have a political and social basis. Over the last eight months we drew together these different forces and organisations for a combined project, and so far it's been very successful. It's really just a question of proposing different methods of struggle to different organisations, and the fact that they've been adopted.

We have also tried to create embryonic structures of direct democracy and participation, rather than the town councillors just making decisions about health and education. All these questions have been discussed in local communities and on estates, so that through a process of pyramid-type democracy (from the ground-up), we've managed to take ideas, questions and problems up from the base to form at the pinnacle a concerted idea of what all the local areas think."

### **Questions from the floor:**

*What percentage of CNT members are in the CNT because they are politically committed to anarcho-syndicalism? What advice can you give to us in Britain?*

"First of all, most members of the CNT are there on an ideological basis and agree with the standpoint of the CNT, but mainly they will have come from different organisations into the CNT - different unions, etc. So what the CNT is also doing is providing evening classes on various different aspects, from ecology to liberalism, to democratic society, so there is also a large slice of education which people are participating in as well. On the second point, it's a bit difficult for me to say, but all I can suggest is that you do the work and you'll see the fruits".

*Did the assemblies just occur during the strike, or have they carried on?*

"There is a permanent dynamic role of the assembly, what we've tried to

do over the years is build assemblies for every shift of whichever factory we're talking about that's on the industrial sphere. In the villages and in the town these assemblies still take place. About two weeks ago, around 2,000 people went to participate in the town assembly. So these do take place, but also we're concentrating very much on the estates and local areas - local assemblies, as well as the main larger one.

Every week the CNT visits different workshops, different factories, taking advantage of the morning break, about 11 o'clock, to go into factories and actually discuss different things with workers, that is something else we do, going as the CNT and talking with people on their breaks".

*Do you have recallable delegates, and do have you ever had a case where a delegate has not represented the views of the members and has had to be recalled? And were those individuals demoralised or pissed off about that? What did they feel about: being kicked off a task?*

"No one has ever had to be recalled, however if any delegate did go against the decisions taken in the assembly they would be recalled and also expelled from the union. But each delegate is there for a fixed period of time, either six months or twelve months, but no one has ever been recalled because no one has ever gone against what's been laid down in the assembly".

*Considering what you have been doing, what has the state done to stop you?*

"One of the things that took place was in Adra which is further east along the coast, some of the CNT members were accused of having taken part in a hold-up in Adra. This was used as an excuse to arrest CNT members and try to crush the union, but since 1977 when the CNT was again legal (following the death of Franco and the end of the dictatorship since 1939), it has been the victim of several different plots, and different acts of repression in order to eliminate the union.

What we concentrated on also was that any acts of violence, or direct action, would involve the whole village itself. We did not set ourselves up as a vanguard group that would go and do these things. We involved the whole village, the whole town or whichever people it concerned, to do that. We were not a vanguard organisation, any violence or direct action taking place was essentially carried out by everyone.

I was accused personally, and other comrades too, of various things, having caused damage up to the value of 15 to 20 million pesetas, and I also had my telephone tapped and various things like that. But those were things that happened to me, and things happened to other comrades as well. So

there was a concerted effort to criminalise the members of the CNT, especially those in prominent positions."

The CNT, Spanish section of the International Workers' Association, has been in existence throughout the 20th century. Up to the coup of General Franco in 1936, the CNT was with over 2 million members the largest workers' organisation in Spain. Following the death of Franco in 1976, the CNT re-emerged as a significant organisation despite being plagued for the following 15 years by many who would rather it did not exist. Today the CNT is well on the path to re-establishing itself as an effective workers' organisation across every region of Spain.

## **Interviews: women in the struggle**

**I**nterview taken from "Icaria", a CNT magazine about women's involvement in the struggle. "Icaria" spoke to the women who had organised independently of the men and played a big-part in the struggle.

*Icaria: How and why did the women of Puerto Real start to take part in the shipyards' struggle?*

Spokeswomen: It started when a woman saw that we were all worked up because on Tuesdays our menfolk were confronting the police and suffering from repression at the shipyards while the media called them all terrorists. This woman took the initiative, contacting neighbours and friends. In turn, they contacted many groups of women and they went out with a megaphone every Tuesday to demonstrate, meeting other women affected by the shipyards problem. At that time the men carried on the struggle inside the shipyards but the problem affected us as much as them. They were not so much demonstrations of support but our own because we depended on the men's wages.

*I: Why did the struggle develop independently of the men?*

SW: Because they were not here - they were in the shipyards which the women weren't able to enter so our struggle was in the town. On Thursdays when the men brought the struggle into the town we went together to the demonstrations and in this way we could create quite a large group of autonomous and independent women.

*I: What type of organisation did you have in the group?*

SW: A co-ordinating committee of 6 women was elected but they didn't take decisions of any kind. Their function was only to co-ordinate. The decisions were made by the assembly on Wednesdays where proposals



were made and voted on by a show of hands.

*I: How many women were there in the group?*

SW: The number varied - we started with 100 and grew to 500. The crossroads where the motorway, National IV, ends, was the symbol of our struggle and where we went to block the motorway.

*I: Were there any women in the 'collective' who were not dependent on the wages of a shipyard worker?*

SW: The majority of women are from shipyard workers' families. However there are women from other backgrounds in the collective.

*I: Was this the first experience of direct action the women had had in the streets?*

SW: Yes, within the context of a women's collective.

*I: What did they think of the violence reported in the media concerning Puerto Real?*

SW: What did we think of the violence? The only violence here was that by the police and it was very heavy. It was heaviest around the 'Cartabon', which was our 'Hill of Martyrs'.

We were a totally independent and autonomous collective. We want to say that we weren't treated gently by the forces of repression because we were women. Our struggle was not only on Tuesdays but a daily struggle with the 'forces of order'. We tried to explain this to other women to get them to understand.

We received support and telegrams from feminist organisations, associations of political prisoners and the Assembly of Women in Cordoba. However there still remains a lot to do.

## **After the strike ...**

Interview with Pepe Gomez, from summer 1987. Taken from the paper of French CNT - AIT.

*Q: Now you've won some concessions notably the construction of a ship, won't this risk demobilising the workers?*

A: Since the last general assembly called by all union sections (CC.OO, UGT, CNT, CAT) we've broken relations with the others as they wanted to sign a worse agreement than previously. We decided to continue the fight and prepare a general strike throughout Cadiz industrial zone. The following

week we called an assembly attended by 1,500 workers.

Workers understand very well the contract is due to their struggle. As the other unions and the works council no longer want to call assemblies the contract will give the CNT a few months' respite... to hold meetings throughout the district, with slides of the struggle and to denounce the agreements signed and other unions' refusal to organise assemblies. We want to show that one ship means nothing... Once we've covered all of Puerto Real we'll call a general assembly of the population - if other unions don't join us (we'd like to call it together) we'll denounce them and do it in the CNT's name.

We want it all to coincide with what will happen from October, November and December onwards with the thousands of workers whom 3 years ago the government promised and signed new jobs or reinstatement if they agreed to go on the FPE (National Fund for Promotion of Employment - workers would be paid 80% of basic pay for 3 years). As we know they can't keep their promises we can expect important struggles throughout the country.

*Q: Nationally, what precisely do you see happening given the UGT and CC.OO remaining the largest unions?*

A: We've prepared meetings with all minority unions like the Left Current in Asturias, a major force in small and medium yards with some prestige like the CNT in Puerto Real; INTGA, a Galician nationalist union which also has a good base; CAT of Euskalduna in the Basque country which is a significant force there... if we unite our potential we can mobilise 20-30,000 shipyard workers outside the bureaucratic unions. We'll have the meetings without the UGT and CC.OO who favour social contract with the state and bosses. Although they haven't signed the new pact, they'll reach a tacit agreement...

From this the CC.OO particularly, will expose its contradictions. For example in the ASTANO yard (Asturias) the majority of workers are in the CC.OO, which will have to call an assembly and if, simultaneously, we do information work and our call is sufficiently solid and united, we can develop a strategy of direct action in the affected areas -something that is difficult to do alone.

*Q: What makes the CNT's actions so difficult?*

A: When for example, we called the last workers' assembly in Puerto Real alone there were cops from all over Andalucia, sent by the civil governor. From the start all acts of terrorism, vandalism, violence, etc have been

blamed on the CNT. When we made a call alone the governor seized the opportunity to hit our organisation hard.

We must be careful, especially now, to maintain momentum, not to get isolated and avoid police set-ups as have happened before. Most importantly for the CNT in Puerto Real is that the struggle and radicalisation continues to be taken up by the workers' and community assemblies. Our role is to organise the means to defend all workers.

Our outlook is that after this summer the struggle will broaden but in the future, on the fundamental question of re-deployment, we won't succeed. The balance of forces today favours the Socialist Party who can rely on the UGT to dampen down social protest, and the CC.OO who give the impression that they are radical but in practice prepare the ground for the Communist Party and its electoral project within the 'United Left'. Thus they need to demobilise workers so that they remain dependent on politicians and their sales-pitches. However they are in a deep financial crisis in maintaining their bureaucracy. Although, if on the fundamental question we don't succeed, the conflict creates a revolutionary dynamic - many CC.OO comrades have torn up their membership cards and joined the CNT.

It's clear redeployment is worldwide and that today's situation favours capitalism. The exemplary struggles waged by workers over the last 10 years and the fact they've seen in practice how they are manipulated, frustrated and betrayed forms a base from which we can grow and build real workers' organisation to resist the state and bosses.



## **2004: The shipyard struggle continues**

### **Reports from February & March 2004**

**T**here is a lot of militant industrial action going on in Spain at the moment, including a national shipyard workers strike which really kicked off this week. Pictures below are of the workers of the Izar shipyards, in Puerto Real (Cadiz), who returned to maintain confrontations with the police, yesterday on the Carranza bridge (there had previously been battles in Puerto Real on 5th and 6th February). This dispute goes back more than a year but has become more confrontational in recent months.

38 strikers were also injured when the police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at a demonstration on the same day at the gates of the shipyard in Seville, during which a van was set alight and used as a barricade.

Demonstrators also blocked train lines in San Fernando. Over 100 home-made rockets were reportedly fired at the police in Seville and another simultaneous demonstration in Cadiz, including a new "crescent moon" design with metal disks that cause severe hand injuries (one policeman had a finger cut off in Cadiz). Many large ball bearings and bolts from the yards were fired at the police with catapults.

The strike is over labour and wage conditions of 11,000 workers of eleven centres including Andalusia, Asturias, the Valencian Community, Galicia, Madrid and the Basque Country (the bosses may also want to close down yards and cut a lot of jobs). There were also demonstrations in La Coruña (4,000 people) and Oviedo. In Bilbao (Sestao shipyard), about 1,200 strikers blocked the Bilbao-Santurce highway with burning tyres.

### **Report - 21st February 2004**

After the big street battles in Cadiz and Sevilla earlier in the week (which were followed by unprecedented actions by the police and shipyard agents who frisked everyone leaving the Cadiz yards and took their photographs as they left the gates and later it was discovered that the police had also mounted 2 cameras and 5 microphones next to the venue for the workers assemblies inside the shipyard), things have calmed down a little in the south. That is, the official unions have taken hold of things. There have been large peaceful demonstrations in Sevilla, Manises and Cadiz.

Yesterday's demonstration of about 6,000 in Cadiz was quite interesting as it was joined by workers from the Delphi car company and workers from

the Comes transport company (who have also gone out on strike over pay today) and Altadis (tobacco manufacturing factory threatened with closure), and seemed to get a lot of support from local people despite a very oppressive police presence and the fact that it was also pissing down throughout!

The police had said that the workers from Puerto Real could not march across the Carranza bridge again, after the blockades on Tuesday, but they went across anyway and the cops backed off. The unions have called for next week to be a week of no protests, but to “inform public opinion”. There are due to be negotiations at the start of March.

Not to be outdone, however, about 1,200 workers of the yards in Bilbao took to the streets on Thursday (19th), blocking the Bilbao-Santurce highway with burning barricades (again). This time the cops were very violent , injuring 30 strikers with rubber bullets and CS gas.

The activities of the strikers are organised in assemblies, with a clear





difference emerging between many of the workers and the official union representatives (who are putting a lot of effort into closing down the street actions of the workers). During the large confrontations at the yards in Sevilla earlier in the month (5th Feb), when one of their comrades was arrested, an improvised assembly organised itself and came up with an offer to the police: set him free and we will stop the battle. Within an hour he was released!

As far as I can make out, one of the issues that has made life difficult for workers' fightback has been the two main unions - the UGT and the CC.OO (because Izar was formed out of 2 shipbuilding companies, each with their own union representation), who have entered into damaging agreements with the owners and maintained the old divisions between workers. The official representatives are seen as being "bought off" by the company and as working in tandem to control the workers. The CNT are very excited about the way the new industrial action has brought a new sense of unity across the company (partly because of being organised in open assemblies). All these strikes have been wildcat actions so far, although there will be "official" action and a ban on overtime in March.

From a leaflet that the CNT has been distributing in the Seville yards:

*"We say: put on the pressure and negotiate at the same time. Are we saying something that is not common sense? A union which worries about the company more than the industrialist himself does, is a weak union. A union that negotiates more than it puts on pressure is a weak union. A union that is dependent on subsidies and state financing is a weak union. A union that fragments the interests and the unity of the workers is a weak union. And all of this is happening at the present time, the unions are getting discredited more each time it happens and the conclusion and the only way out is class struggle. This is what we've always known: that when the other means fail, taking the conflict to the street and pushing politically will open any door."*

### **Report - 24th February 2004**

Quiet day monday with 3,500 astilleros from the shipyards of Fene and Ferrol, in the north of Spain (La Coruna), marching through Santiago (the capital of Galicia). A few fireworks were thrown at the local parliament buildings while the union leaders went inside and were patronised by the Spanish equivalent of Mike O'Brien.

### **Report - 2nd March 2004**

The astilleros of Puerto Real (Cadiz) came out again this morning and blocked the main road into Cadiz for a few hours. The usual tanks and

rubber bullets came out to stop them reaching Cadiz but they managed to put a few cops in hospital with bolts fired from catapults and they had 3 separate burning barricades going at one point.

They caught the cops by surprise as no actions had been announced today, but an assembly was held at the shipyard at about 0800 this morning which decided to go for it! The boss of the state organisation SEPI (State Society of Industrial Organisation, the organisation that controls the government stake in the shipyard company IZAR) announced yesterday that the workers had two choices: to accept their previous offer or "permanent conflict" (I thought at the time that this was a touch foolish on his part!). A union leader at the yards said that the workers in the assembly were not under their control and had decided to give the boss a dose of the permanent conflict! There is a national demonstration organised for Friday but they could not wait until then!

### **Report - 5th March 2004**

Somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 shipyard workers and supporters marched through Madrid in a demonstration called by the six main unions



involved in the yards: CCOO, UGT, CIGA, ELA, USTG and CAT. It was a lively and combative march, with enormous firecrackers being set off throughout (despite pleas from union leaders for this to stop).

There was little trouble, other than some 15 Madrileño anti-Capitalists being attacked by riot police on their way home afterwards. The march ended in a rally outside the headquarters of SEPI. One of the slogans being chanted was "Si esto no se arregla, guerra, guerra, guerra; si esto no se apaña, caña, caña, caña!", which sort of roughly translates as "If this is not agreed, war, war war; if this is not sorted out, bash, bash, bash!".

There were the usual speeches, although some quite good speakers who talked about direct action being the only way forward, and when union leaders José Maria Fidalgo (CC.OO Workers Commission, the biggest Spanish Union, similar to the T&G) and Cándido Méndez (UGT General Workers Union, similar to the GMB) appeared they were apparently booed by a lot of demonstrators. Méndez keeps going on about how the strike is "not political" but is purely a "labour issue". It would seem that union officials all speak bullshit, the language that transcends borders.

### **Report 21st March 2004**

Following the train bombings in Madrid on 11th March, which was the date of the first scheduled day of action, the demonstrations were all cancelled. The attacks were carried out by Islamist terrorists 3 days before the general elections and killed 191 people and wounded 1,800. Although the 3-hour strikes still took place, the shipyard workers in Cadiz stood outside the local Government offices in solidarity with the victims of the attack. The workers of Puerto Real lined the Carrenza bridge holding placards condemning the bombings (but did not block the bridge). The strikers in Seville and San Fernando stood at the gates of their yard with banners condemning terrorism.

Following the PSOE (Spanish "Socialist" Workers Party) election win on 14th March, the six main unions involved in the Izar strikes will be meeting on Tuesday 23rd March to decide whether or not to continue with the rest of the scheduled days of action (the next 3-hour strike is due on the next day). There are already signs that the leaders of the unions are preparing to call things off, or at least suspend the strikes, with especially conciliatory language coming from the UGT. The Andalusian provincial secretary of the UGT, Pedro Custodio González, said on Thursday that "the political situation has changed in this country," and that with this "the situation has returned to normality and the period of tension was over". The decision is

not entirely straightforward, however, as both the IZAR company's management and directors of SEPI have continued to talk tough and take aggressive action towards the strikers, including suspending ten members of the union committee at the Ferrol shipyards - a move which has raised the tension considerably.

## September and October 2004

Right up until the Spanish elections in March 2004 (and the train bomb attacks in Madrid), the shipyards of Spain were in open revolt against wage levels and lack of work for the 11,000 workers of the State-run IZAR shipyards. Battles raged across the country, particularly on the streets of Cadiz (in the South) and Bilbao (in the North) and an aggressive programme of strike action was in place. In addition to the workers directly employed by IZAR, there are 60,000 in the auxiliary sector (often subcontractors) and 36,000 in adjacent industries. The Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union CNT were heavily involved in the auxiliary companies of the shipyards of Seville and Puerto Real, although recent job cuts seem to have reduced their influence.

When the New Labourish PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – Spanish “Socialist” Workers Party, a social democratic party) won the election the main shipyard unions dramatically made a pact with the new government to cancel the whole campaign of industrial action. Officially this was to give the government “a chance” to save the shipyards. Unofficially, the unions were losing control of the workers action and the unions also took cynical advantage of widespread revulsion against the train bombings to call a halt to the violent strike action.

So disgusted were the CNT with this dramatic and total union sell-out that they wrote off the shipyards at the time as having no future – even writing a requiem for the industry, which had already undergone three restructuring plans in the 1980s with the loss of 30,000 jobs. Back in March it looked like the yards had rolled over to the new government and were finished.

As the summer progressed, it appeared that this prediction was coming true. The government set up a commission to look at the future of the shipyards, a move that was interpreted as trying to find a new way to cut back the industry. In July it was revealed that the previous PP government (Partido Popular or People's Party – similar to Tories) had known that the European Union was demanding the return of €300 million of illegal subsidies given to IZAR, but had not bothered to mention this to the PSOE

Everything came to a head on 8th September when SEPI (the organisation which runs the shipyards for the State) announced that it was going to split the shipyards in two and privatise half of them. The state would convert half of the yards into profitable military ship production (and keep control of them) and the other half would become a commercial ship company and be sold off.

The following day the shipyard workers went out on the streets across Spain and the mainstream unions called four days of official strike action through September. For the rest of that week the workers of San Fernando (Cadiz), whose yard is threatened with closure, battled with the police and erected burning barricades across motorways and railway lines.

The first official strike day on 14th September featured demonstrations at all 10 Spanish yards, with street battles and barricades outside the Cadiz yards of San Fernando and Puerto Real. The next day, in a pattern to be successfully repeated throughout September, wildcat action by the workers of San Fernando took the police by surprise, erecting burning barricades to block major roads and on this occasion overturning a car on the motorway and setting it alight.

On 16th September the workers of the Sestao yards of Bilbao rioted, setting fire to a number of barricades and blocking roads and railway lines (at one point a forklift was used to pile up material to make a better road block!). The fighting was widespread and fierce, with one worker losing an eye when the particularly nasty Basque “Ertzaintza” riot police attacked the workers with CS gas and rubber balls. Workers in Puerto Real also took to the streets using catapults to fire steel bolts at the police who blocked their way into Cadiz with armoured cars and a tank. The workers of San Fernando decided to take a day off as they had fought with the police and blocked roads for the past six days!

The next day (17th Sept) a large group of shipyard workers in Seville tried to block the huge Centennial V Bridge (in the background of the picture below) but were forced back towards the yards by a ferocious riot police attack that left at least 23 injured. They blocked another main road instead, with lampposts and furniture taken from a lorry.

Official strike days were called on 21, 28 and 30th September and were generally marked by large peaceful demonstrations, although individual yards still rose up in more violent revolt. On 21st September it was Gijón's turn, with roads and railways blocked. On 23rd September workers in Sestao built barricades from burning cars and on 24th workers in Gijón



rioted again, blocking roads with burning tyres. On 27th September workers from the San Fernando yards blocked the main railway line with for the second day running, but this time they also ripped up 100 metres of track!

On the 28th there were demonstrations at every shipyard in Spain. Throughout this dispute the local communities that surround the shipyards have shown widespread support for the strikers, joining them in large numbers on their demonstrations. This unity of action across the workers in Spain's shipyard industry has been a welcome change, as in the past different regional politicians and unions have been able to play the yards off against each other, and there has been a fear that some of the smaller yards would be left to fend for themselves.

This unity took a bit of a knock on 30th September when the workers of Sestao discovered that a ship which was going to be built at their yard was switching to Puerto Real. Their anger over this decision provoked one of most violent days in the city.

In Ferrol a peaceful demonstration of 3,000 workers turned violent when the strikers began to block roads leading into the port. Later in the day sentries at one of Ferrol's military installations threatened demonstrators with an assault rifle after they threw fireworks towards them. Meanwhile, the workers of Manises blocked the runway at Valencia airport. The workers of Manises are particularly worried that the local government want to sell off their yard to property developers because of the high value of the land.

On 1st October there was a widespread general strike in San Fernando and Puerto Real in support of the shipyards, the first strike of its kind since 1991. A demonstration of 25,000 people in Seville on 5th October brought shipyard workers from across Andalucia onto the streets, along with workers from the Altadis factories and the Magical Island theme park of Seville (who are also threatened with closure), and workers from FASA-Renault and EADS-CASA.

The latest day of action was on 6th October. In Seville, there was what was described as a "pitched battle" with the police after they stopped the shipyard workers from marching into the city. The workers fired home-made rockets at the police, burned cars and threw petrol bombs. In San Fernando, another fierce battle around the shipyard itself saw a 38 year old man lose an eye after been shot by the police some 60 metres inside the factory. An ambulance taking him to hospital was blocked by a tank that was deliberately parked across the gates of the yard. Workers in Puerto

Real again fought the tanks and armoured cars of police who stopped them from entering Cadiz. The strikers later displayed missiles that the police had been firing at them.

The concerted and violent action of the shipyard workers has shaken the new President Zapatero, with some commentators referring to them as being “urban guerillas”. On the union front, the pressure is increasing and splits are appearing between the mainstream unions. The two largest unions (CC.OO and CGT) have come out in support of privatisation in the last few days, much to the dismay of all the other unions.

In advance of the latest meeting between the unions and SEPI, several yards (including Seville and Gijon) have put their plans for industrial action on hold to see the new proposal that is apparently on offer: no closures and no job losses. It remains to be seen if this is all it first appears and what protection there will be for the workers of the Auxiliary Industry.



## Interview

Interview with a member of the union branch of CNT in the Shipyard of Seville

- P: *Can you tell us who you are?*

- R: I am a worker of the auxiliary industry of the shipyard of Seville, although to talk about it as an auxiliary industry doesn't seem right to me when we are responsible for 80% of ship production. I am also a member of the CNT union branch in the shipyard. In this interview I am expressing my own opinion, I am not acting as a spokesman.

- P: *Is it true that the naval sector is in crisis? Where does this crisis come from?*

- R: The crisis is not happening because of a lack of competitiveness, from high costs or competition from other shipyards. The crisis is caused by the incompetence of the bureaucracy in the shipyards. We can point the finger at certain individuals in politically appointed positions, and negligent penpushers who instead of looking for markets, orders, sales, or reaching agreements with REPSOL...[oil company], they stand around with their mouths open catching flies. We have shown that we have finished ships before our deadlines. The problem is not due to a lack of competitiveness, we have shown that. What we are demanding from the directors of the Shipyard is that they do their work, they get the orders in, they don't wait around for the orders to fall from the sky like rain.

- P: *Have you offered any alternative plans for keeping the shipyards open?*

- R: No

- P: *Can you explain?*

- R: We do not have to offer an alternative to a crisis that they have created themselves. It's a mistake to enter into negotiations about reorganization, dismissals, undercover closures and productivity increases. If they want plans, let them rack their brains, and we'll make sure that we stand up to them if it doesn't suit us.

- P: *Are you present in the negotiations?*

- R: We have not been interested so far. The forums that are open lack decision-making ability, and the people that go there just go to talk and pose, or to take their cut like the IU [Izquierda Unita - United Left, a coalition of Leninist Parties] and the PSOE [Partido Socialista Obrero Español - a social democratic government Party, similar to the Labour Party] do. The unions of the company committee are just there to waste

time. We must construct another type of unionism outside this environment, in the periphery.

- P: *What is the composition of forces in the company committee?*

- R: In the Shipyard of Seville only 300 people work for the IZAR group, the old Spanish Shipyards company [Astilleros Españoles]. The Shipyards have undergone a conversion process over the last twenty years that has made the auxiliary industry dominant. In the auxiliary industry companies we have 1100 workers. However, the company committee remains an IZAR committee, because the auxiliary companies lack these organisations, or if they do have them they are inoperative. In the IZAR committee the CC.OO [Comisiones Obreras – Workers Commission, the biggest trade union confederation in Spain] has been running the show for thirty years. They win elections time and time again because they have built a network of clients in the company where everybody gets "favours".

- P: *What is the influence of the CNT?*

- R: CNT has a union branch that organizes through its affiliates in the Shipyard. Our arguments are receiving a good welcome in the assemblies and we have influenced several hundred workers. This is not propaganda, it is the truth.

- P: *How do you exert that influence?*

- R: We explain our positions and avoid turning into a vanguard. We oppose the instability of our working situation, and we demonstrate for the maintenance of employment and the dignity of the workers. When we are sure that people are ready for action, we are the first to join them. We try and get people to express themselves and fight for their rights at the margins, not through the "suits" and their cultured words. We have an influence because our message is expressed by people who do things, rather than by mere spokesmen. We are also determined to fight for union freedom, for the rights that are being held hostage by the system of company committees (where they exist), and by repression and fear in the auxiliary companies where there are no committees. That is what we say and that's why we have our influence.

- P: *Which is the role of the IZAR committee in this conflict?*

- R: The role of the committee is the role of the State Metalworkers Federation of the CC.OO - that is to try and cool down the industrial action. They do have influence in IZAR, but they don't have control over the auxiliary industry. They are scared of a conflict arising in the auxiliary

industry, since they would lack representation there and a conflict could ignite. That is my opinion.

- P: *What is the relationship between the company committee and the CNT in the shipyard?*

- R: In general, one of mutual respect. On some occasions there have been very serious confrontations, when we have seen that they held back the industrial action.

- P: *What resources can the CNT branch count on, if you lack representation on the company committee and don't fight elections? How can you negotiate in those conditions?*

- R: Our resources are those of our branch, those of CNT Seville, and of the CNT in Andalusia and Spain, plus whatever forces the workers lend to us when they carry our banners, plus the solidarity of people who support us. To have all that we did not need to participate in the union elections. Negotiations do not depend on anything other than force. We have no legal representation, yet our opinions are still considered. In order to make anarcho-syndicalism the only thing you need is militancy. I don't know if this will sound very dogmatic, but it I see it happening and I practice it. Where has traditional trade unionism got us after twenty years of State handouts, subsidies and the representative system?

- P: *In the last few years CNT Seville has gained a lot of prominence with a series of both large and small conflicts, for example in the shipyard...*

- R: I believe that the importance of CNT Seville is less than that of the dozens of other branches of the CNT that are battling courageously all across Spain at the moment. This is about the CNT generally, not about CNT Seville.

- P: *It is true that the yards construct ships for the military?*

- R: In Seville we did not work on any type of military project. There are shipyards in Cartagena and Galicia that do work for the military. Personally, I think if that happened in Seville, we would take them to task. Working for the police, the military, or constructing ships for the Navy, I believe that this is all very similar. I think that there are better ways to make a living.

- P: *Have you considered self-managing the Shipyard?*

- R: No. I believe that that would be very complicated at the moment. In order to arrive at that point we need more experience. We can see that.



- P: What type of industrial action you are planning?

- R: There is a calendar of industrial action that we are planning, with strikes, demonstrations, etc.

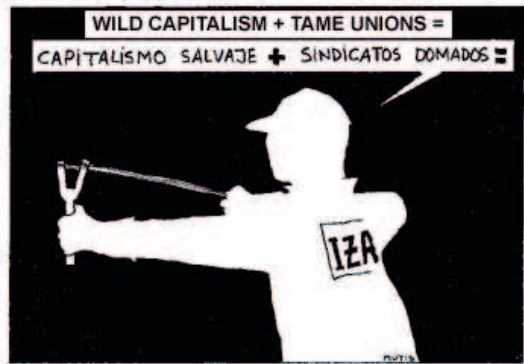
- P: Why is there a climate of confrontation with the police?

- R: What do you expect the climate to be? The police are agents of the Government.

They make it impossible for the conflict to remain within the shipyard, and then whenever we try to demonstrate in the city they crush us with all their resources.

- P: But in the press and on the TV there are images of the workers throwing devices at the police...

- R: I don't know what you want me to say. What do expect them to throw? Flowers? You notice that they don't show what the police are throwing at us: rubber balls and new kinds of tear gas. Dozens of our comrades have passed through the casualty department of the Virgen del Rocío [hospital in Seville]. There are a couple of them who may have irreversible eye injuries. The police arrive all hooded-up, with body armour, masks, riot shields, armored cars, spy cameras, tanks, electric cattle prods, shotguns... they bring everything. Next they enter the factory and they smash it up: they demolish fences, they destroy machinery, they dent cars, they break windscreens, they shoot bullets and they create a state of terror. If they issued the order for them to kill us, then they would kill us. Nobody can say that the workers have responded equally. The only police that had problems were two that were hit by rockets from somewhere. But you see, these things happen. It must be clear: we are workers exercising our rights: the right to strike, the right to demonstrate and express ourselves, the right to the work, the right to unionise, and the right to live with dignity. Those that use violence to take away those rights are the representatives of the State. Those who defend their rights, they do not make violence.



*If you would like to discuss this pamphlet, please post at  
[www.solfed.org.uk/?q=pamphlets/puertoreal](http://www.solfed.org.uk/?q=pamphlets/puertoreal)*

## sources

Reports from 2004 by Jim Bradley  
Revolutions Per Minute  
<http://www.red-star-research.org.uk/rpm/>

Interview with CNT member from Sevilla, translated by Jim Bradley  
<http://tinyurl.com/AstilleroDeSevilla>